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ABSTRACT

In January 1973 the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service launched "Project OVERVIEW", a leader and problem identification pilot survey. The focus of the project was to gain additional information on county leadership structure and to identify current problems or issues facing counties. Leaders were systematically identified through a modified reputational approach. Information in this report was gathered from 7 counties, representing the 7 Extension Administrative Districts in the state. A response rate of 75% (511 community leaders) was obtained by a "mail back" questionnaire. Data for leaders included age, length of residence in the county, educational attainment, occupation, orientation towards community, and a measure of Flexibility-Rigidity. Since this data represented the first relatively large pool of recorded information on community leaders from rural areas, the analysis will be designed so that comparisons may be made with similar research conducted in urban settings. (KM)

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CHARACTERISTICS OF NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY LEADERS*

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In developing programs that foster social change, it is imperative that adequate information be available to the program planners about not only the social and cultural setting in which the change is to be implemented, but of those key position incumbents who inhibit, or enhance the possibility of that change being implemented. The following report will speak to some of the characteristics of these key position incumbents, community leaders, from several North Carolina counties. This information flows from a larger effort in which these key position incumbents were asked to identify problems or issues they perceived as limiting the potential for their counties. They were also asked to identify others whom they considered to be in key leadership roles in their counties.

In January 1973 the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service launched "Project OVERVIEW", a leader and problem identification survey on a pilot basis. The focus of Project OVERVIEW is to gain additional information in regard to the leadership structure of a county and to identify current problems or issues facing that county. After the initial announcement and description of the Project, County Extension staffs were asked to volunteer to participate in the effort. This report will deal with information gathered from seven counties, one representing each of the seven Extension Administrative Districts in the State. Data reported here were assembled from "mail back" questionnaires left with the community leader following the interview by a member of the local Extension Staff or a member of the U.S.D.A. Rural Development Panel. Responses from 511 community leaders in these seven counties will be reported in this paper. This represents a response rate of over 75% for all community leaders who were interviewed.

While the focus of Project OVERVIEW has been directly on Extension program development at the county level, and indirectly on Extension Staff development, the information provided by community leaders will assist state level Extension personnel in more adequately devising state-wide educational programs and materials by tailoring them more closely to client groups. Also, as time permits, additional analysis of this data may add to that fund of knowledge existant within the social science community regarding community leadership and decision making. Most research in this area to date has been conducted in metropolitan centers. Since North Carolina is a predominantly rural state, most respondents were residents of rural counties. Only one county reported in this paper is located within a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area, and would not be classified as a metropolitan county if it were isolated from its urban neighbor.

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THE COUNTIES

As indicated earlier, the participating counties were self-selected. Those being discussed in this paper were the first to volunteer for the Project in their respective Extension Districts. Consequently, no claim may be laid for these counties being representative of the state. However, they do represent in large part the general economic base and locational phenomenon of the state. For the purposes of reporting, the data will be presented for the rural metropolitan county; the two metropolitan fringe counties and the remaining four rural counties.

Until its recent designation as a part of the Charlotte SMSA, Gaston County met all the criteria for a rural county as defined by the Rural Development Act of 1972. However, with its entrance into the SMSA, it has lost this distinction. Granted, it is a very densely settled rural county with a number of small to medium sized towns, but for the most part is a densely populated rural area. It is located immediately to the west of Charlotte and had a population of 148,415 in 1970. Being the historic seat of the textile industry in the southeast, it has been a highly industrialized rural area for over 100 years. The first cotton mills opened in the 1840's and today still forms the backbone of the economy, along with the manufacture of textile machinery, and a trucking industry that has met the transportation requirements of the textile based economy. Commercial agriculture has never provided a livelihood for large numbers of Gaston County residents, with the pattern tending towards small farms where one or more of the family members were employed in a nearby mill.

Two of the counties reported here are located on the metropolitan fringe. Granville, with a 1970 population of 32,762, is located on the Virginia border just to the North of Durham and Raleigh. This county has a history of relatively large farms and agriculture still forms a significant portion of the economic backbone. However, in recent years a number of small manufacturing plants have been located in the county, several large governmental institutions have been located on an abandoned military complex, and improved roads have made the Raleigh-Durham labor market accessable to old time residents and to new residents fleeing these urban centers for residential purposes. Pender is the other metropolitan fringe county. Located in southeastern North Carolina and bordered on the East by the Atlantic Ocean and on the South by the Wilmington metropolitan area, its economic backbone is still agriculture and fishing. However, most of the labor force that is not employed in agriculture must travel beyond county lines to gain a livelihood - at a nearby military complex, or in one of the many industries of the Wilmington area.

Three of the four rural counties reported here are border counties. Hertford and Surry are located on the Virginia border. Hertford is about 50 miles South of the Norfolk metropolitan area while Surry is located on the eastern slope of the Appalachian mountains, about 50 miles North of the

Winston-Salem metropolitan area. Macon county is located on the Georgia border in the midst of the North Carolina mountains and is about 125 miles directly North of Atlanta. Moore county is in the center of the Sandhills section about 50 miles South of Raleigh and is best known as the site of some of the finest golf courses on the continent.

All four of these counties are heavily dependent on agriculture for their economic base along with manufacturing and tourism. In 1970 the population for these counties was as follows: Hertford - 23,529; Surry - 51,415; Macon - 15,788; and Pender - 18,149.

THE DATA

The data reported below have been hand tabulated and are subject to the errors of hand tabulation. Where data are reported as percentages, they have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Age

Age of the respondents varied from under 30 to well over 60. For purposes of reporting here the ages have been grouped into ten-year age spans.

TABLE I

Age of North Carolina Community Leaders by County

COUNTY	Under 30 %	30-39 %	40-49 %	50-59 %	60 & Over %	N.R. %
Gaston	2	14	42	28	11	3
Granville	3	10	26	33	28	1
Pender	3	17	34	27	19	0
Hertford	3	23	28	35	11	0
Macon	4	35	24	22	15	0
Moore	2	12	38	33	15	0
Surry	6	19	33	22	20	0
All Counties	3	19	32	28	18	0

Presentation of data in this manner does not allow the precise determination of median ages for the community leaders studied, but it does allow for approximations. The median age for the group reported above would be in the high 40's. Those leaders reporting from Gaston tend to be somewhat younger, with their median age falling in the low 40's. Granville County leaders with a median age in their low 50's represent the oldest group for reporting counties.

This data on Age of Community leaders is similar to that reported by others who have investigated the phenomenon of community power and decision making.

Length of Residence

While it would be anticipated that age and length of residence would be highly correlated, our current analysis does not allow us to speak to this point. However, it is interesting to note that two of the rural counties had the highest proportion of their responding leaders as relatively new residents: Macon with 33% and Moore with 25%. It is also

TABLE II

Length of Residence In County (years) of North Carolina Community Leaders by County

COUNTY	Under 10 %	10-19 %	20-29 %	30-39 %	40 & Over %	N.R. %
Gaston	16	21	7	21	35	
Granville	14	7	17	16	46	1
Pender	19	8	24	9	40	
Hertford	17	20	22	16	25	
Macon	33	7	17	21	22	
Moore	25	14	17	6	38	
Surry	18	17	12	15	38	
All Counties	20	13	16	16	35	

interesting to note that the two metropolitan fringe counties had the highest proportion of responding leaders who were long-time residents: Granville with 46% and Pender with 40%.

Education

While the mean educational attainment for all North Carolina residents age 25 and over was 10.6 in 1970, the group of community leaders responding in this study represent a significantly higher educational attainment. Some 60% report having completed college or gone beyond. Another 23% indicated some training beyond high school, including vocational-technical education or some college. Still another 11% completed high school. This leaves only 6% of the respondents who were near or below the mean educational attainment for North Carolina adults.

TABLE III

Educational Attainment of North Carolina
Community Leaders by County

COUNTY	Some Grade School %	Completed Grade School %	Some High School %	Completed High School %	Trade or Voc. School %	Some College %	Completed College %	Some Grad. Work %	A Graduate Degree %	No Response %
Gaston	0	0	1	6	3	21	23	14	32	0
Granville	2	2	6	12	1	24	21	7	25	1
Pender	2	0	3	16	3	24	13	3	36	0
Hertford	0	2	2	11	3	12	19	25	26	0
Macon	0	1	7	12	5	20	20	14	20	1
Moore	0	0	4	10	2	17	21	10	36	0
Surry	2	0	3	16	3	24	13	3	36	0
All Counties	1	1	4	11	4	19	19	13	28	0

While 41% of all respondents reported training beyond the baccalaureate, a higher proportion of respondents from Gaston (46%), Hertford (51%) and Moore (46%) indicated post baccalaureate training.

Occupation

In his 1968 book, Community Structure and Decision Making, Terry Clark summarizes a number of the studies done on community influentials in the past. In his summary of ten studies he found that the distribution of

influentials among occupational groups were as follows:[1]

	%
Business	52
Government	13
Independent Professions	10
Education	5
Communication	5
Labor	4
Religion	4
Welfare and cultural (civic leaders)	4
Society and Wealth	3
Agriculture	1

While the studies reported by Clark represent information gathered in relatively large urban settings, it must be remembered that the data reported here come primarily from relatively rural areas. While our data is not presently coded so that it is completely consistent with Clark's coding scheme, there is a good bit of similarity between the two schemes. Because of their importance to Extension programming activities, we have identified leaders of Youth Programs, Homemakers who have no additional occupational identification, and a group that is Retired.

TABLE IV

Occupation of North Carolina Community Leaders
by County

COUNTY	Business & Industry %	Education %	Gov't & Politics %	Health & Welfare %	Religion %	Youth Programs %	Homemaker %	Farmer %	Retired %
Gaston	47	10	14	4	8	4	6	7	0
Granville	41	21	5	0	7	0	12	15	0
Pender	33	22	5	18	9	0	3	10	0
Hertford	39	21	19	12	5	0	1	5	0
Macon	48	14	8	11	10	0	0	4	5
Moore	58	8	11	6	11	2	0	4	0
Surry	40	7	19	8	10	4	6	6	0
All Counties	43	15	11	8	8	1	5	8	1

[1]Clark, Terry, Community Structure and Decision Making. San Francisco Chandler Publishing Company, 1968. pp 324

Considering the difference in population density between those studies reported by Clark and our data, there are many surprising similarities. Business and Industry accounted for 43% of the leadership responding in this study as compared to 52% in the studies reported by Clark. Government represented 13% of the respondents in Clark's studies while it represented only 11% in our studies. There is a rather dramatic difference in relation to Education as an occupation, 5% in Clark's studies and 15% in ours. There are rather close similarities in other comparable categories.

Community Orientation

As a measure of community orientation, the scale developed by Thomas R. Dye[2] was utilized. The respondents in this study conformed in general to those studied by Dye. From his data, the expected median scale score would be 15. When aggregating the data from all seven counties the median score for this group was also 15. The extremes are represented by Granville County with a median score of 13 and Gaston County with a median score of 18. Four other counties, Hertford, Macon, Moore and Surry fell right at the median while Pender fell at 14, one point below the median. From this it might in general be assumed that the Gaston County leaders are somewhat more cosmopolitan in their orientation to community and the Granville leaders are somewhat more localite in their orientation than the total group as a whole.

Flexibility vs Rigidity

As a measure of flexibility - rigidity, or openmindedness-closedmindedness, the Troldahl-Powell short form dogmatism scale was utilized.[3]

The median scale score for this group of respondents fell at 39. The possible range for scores is 10 through 60. The extremes in medians were again expressed by Granville respondents with a median of 36 and Gaston with a median of 41. Medians for Hertford, Macon and Surry fell at 40 while Moore fell at 38 and Pender at 37.

While the authors caution that this scale, as utilized in our study, should be considered only the grossest measure of Dogmatism, it does give some general insight into the "mind-set" of the respondents from these counties. The Gaston respondents could be generally considered to be somewhat more flexible than the norm for the total group while the Granville respondents tend to be somewhat less flexible than the norm. The very fact that median scale scores for the seven counties covered only a five point range must be some indication as to the usefulness of this measure for the purposes to which it was put.

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[2]Dye, Thomas R.. "The Local-Cosmopolitan Dimension and the Study of Urban Politics." Social Forces, Vol. 41, pp 239-246

[3]Troldahl, V. C. and Powell, F. A.. "A Short-Form Dogmatism Scale For Use in Field Studies." Social Forces, Vol. 44, pp 211-214

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

As is very apparent from the presentation above, there are many questions that may be answered when this data is subjected to further analysis. Plans are currently underway to prepare this data for machine analysis so that proper controls might be implemented when investigating to the relevant variables. Since this data pool represents the first relatively large pool of recorded information on community leaders from rural areas the analysis will be designed so that comparisons may be made with similar research conducted in urban settings. Following the initial analysis from these seven counties, additional data will be added to this pool as the OVERVIEW Process is completed in additional counties, thus increasing the value of this data pool over time for continuing analysis.

SUMMARY

This paper has reported preliminary summary analysis of data gathered from community leaders in seven North Carolina Counties. These leaders were systematically identified through a modified reputational approach and were interviewed by a member of the local Agricultural Extension Staff or a member of the county U.S.D.A. Rural Development Panel. The interviewer left a "Mail-Back" questionnaire with each respondent following a face-to-face interview where problems facing the county and names of other leaders were elicited. Results reported above represent information gathered from 311 respondents, over 75% of those eligible to respond.

Data regarding Age, Length of Residence in the County, Educational Attainment, Occupation, Orientation Towards Community, and a measure of Flexibility-Rigidity are reported.